A Thoreau Triptych

for keyboard instrument

Barry R. Morse

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Urbana, Illinois
November 28, 2014

Performance Notes:

1. *A Thoreau Triptych* is written for any keyboard instrument, namely piano, harpsichord or organ, with special considerations (see below), and narration supplied by a dedicated narrator, or better yet, the keyboardist him/herself.

2. The text uses quotations from American philosopher, writer and naturalist Henry David Thoreau (1817-1862) on the subjects of Nature, Man and Myth.

3. Special considerations for each keyboard instrument are:

piano: pedaling is not indicated and may be supplied by the player *ad libitum*

harpsichord: notated sustained pitches may be freely reattacked and/or trilled as necessary to sustain the sound

organ: no pedals nor registration were notated. The player may freely add notes and timbral changes where desired.

4. With a few exceptions, dynamics and articulations are also left to the player's discretion to better accompany the ebb and flow of dramatic reading.

5. Ideally, the player will play the keyboard instrument and recite the text at the same time. This is to ensure rhythmic alignment between the two which is important in several places. A microphone may need to be used for the narration, especially if organ is to be used.

6. The text should be read in such a way that it does not slow down too obviously to accommodate musical figures of many notes or difficult rhythms on words and phrases where they occur. Tempo should be as smooth as possible over the length of each movement without being mechanical. Before beginning, consider the more difficult passages first.

7. Some words are followed by horizontal lines. This does not mean to sustain the sound of a syllable as in singing, but rather to indicate that the spoken word should last the duration of the musical figure beneath it. Care should be taken so that such words are not substantially slower than the surrounding text. Again, consider pacing.

8. Total duration: c. 9'30"

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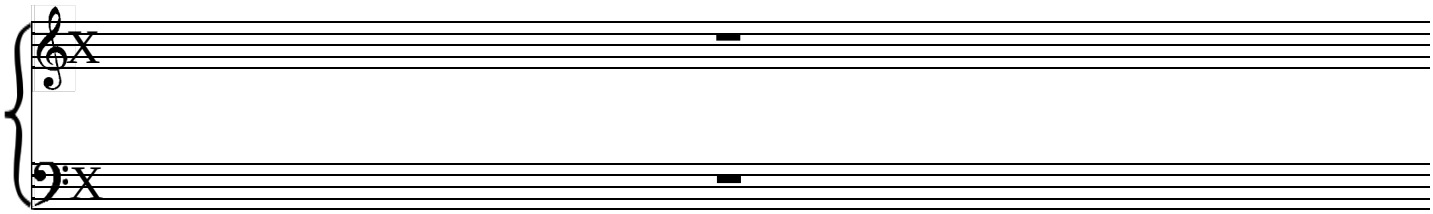
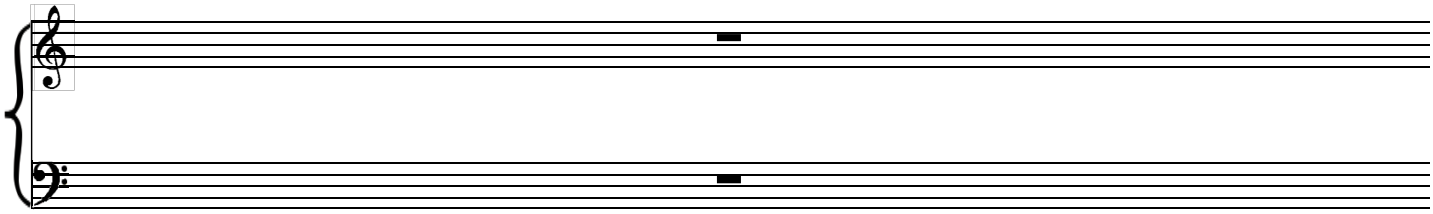
I. Thoreau on Nature

Senza misura; speak naturally, clearly and in a relaxed manner:

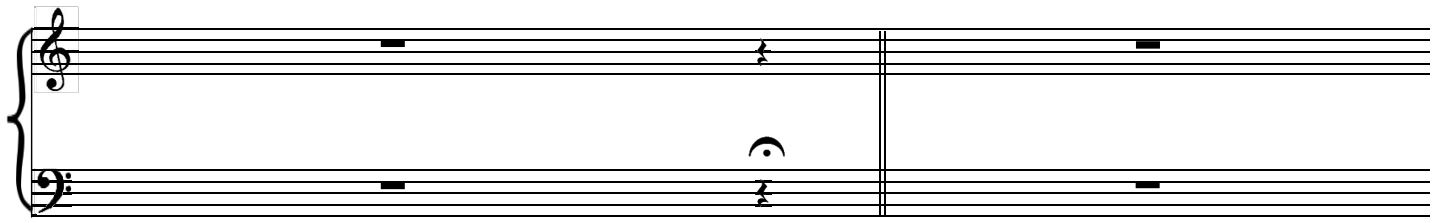
I wish to speak a word for Nature, for absolute Freedom and Wildness, as contrasted with a

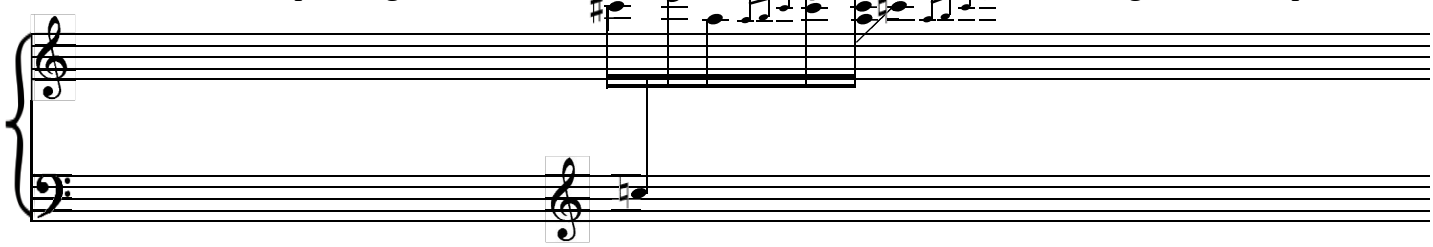


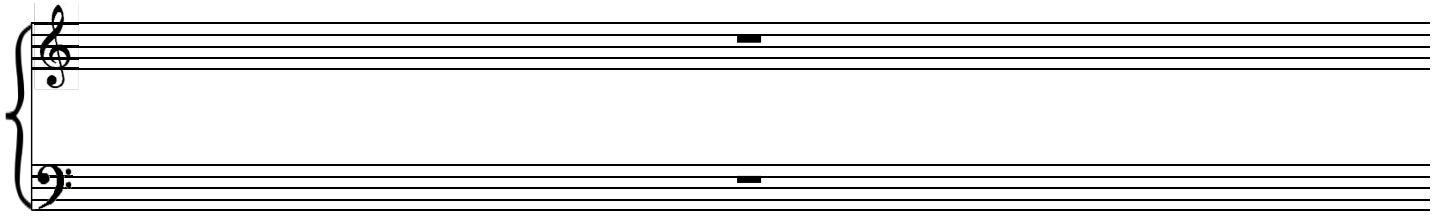
Freedom and Culture merely civil, -----to regard man as an inhabitant, or a part and parcel of



Nature, rather than a member of society. Every leaf and twig was this morning

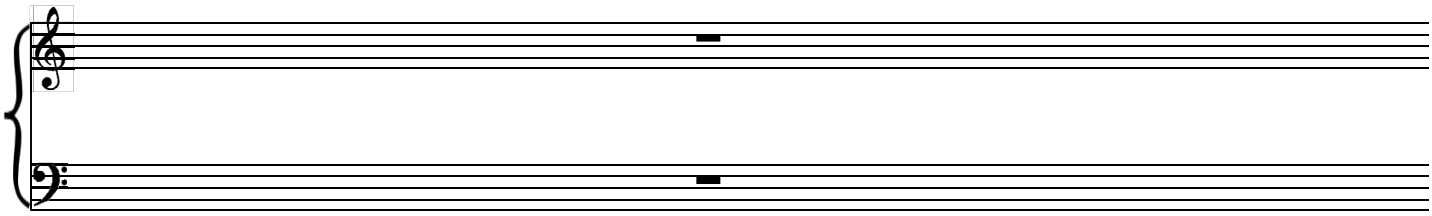


covered with a sparkling ice armor; even the grasses in exposed

fields were hung with innumerable diamond pendants, which jingled merrily when brushed by the foot

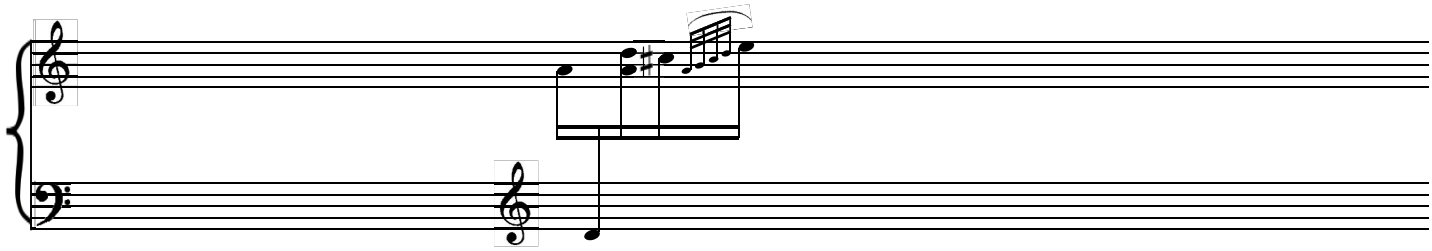


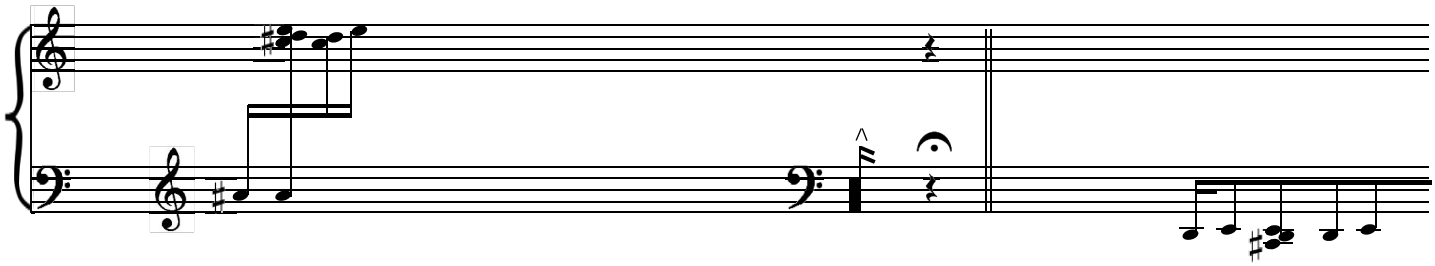
of the traveler. It was literally the wreck of jewels and the crash of gems---

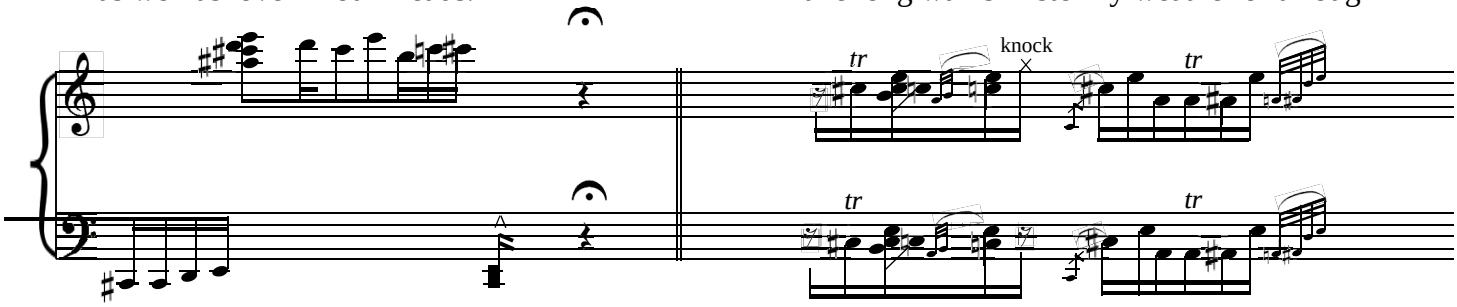
Such is beauty ever---neither here nor there, now nor then---neither in Rome nor in Athens, but



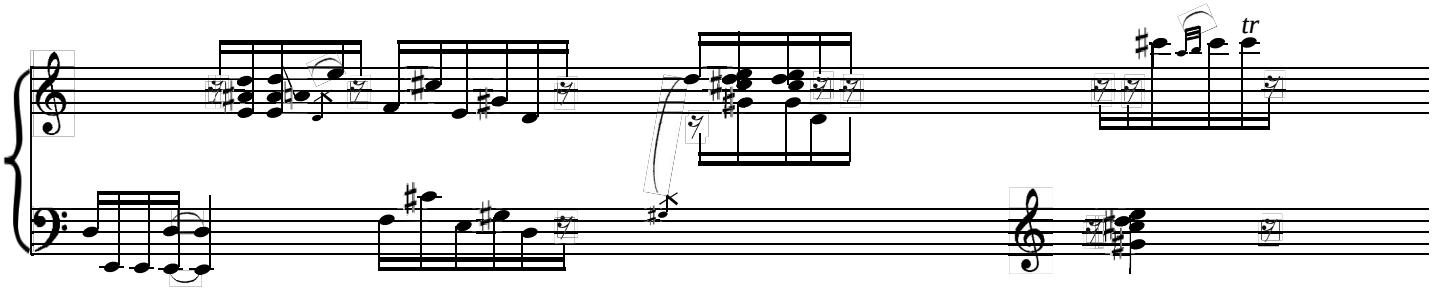
wherever there is a soul to admire. If I seek her elsewhere because I do not find her



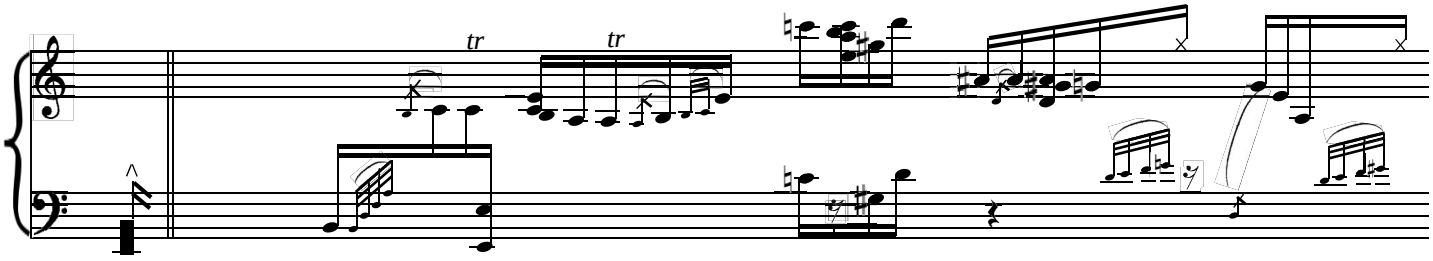
at home, my search will prove a fruitless one. Heaven is under our feet

as well as over our heads. Take long walks in stormy weather or through



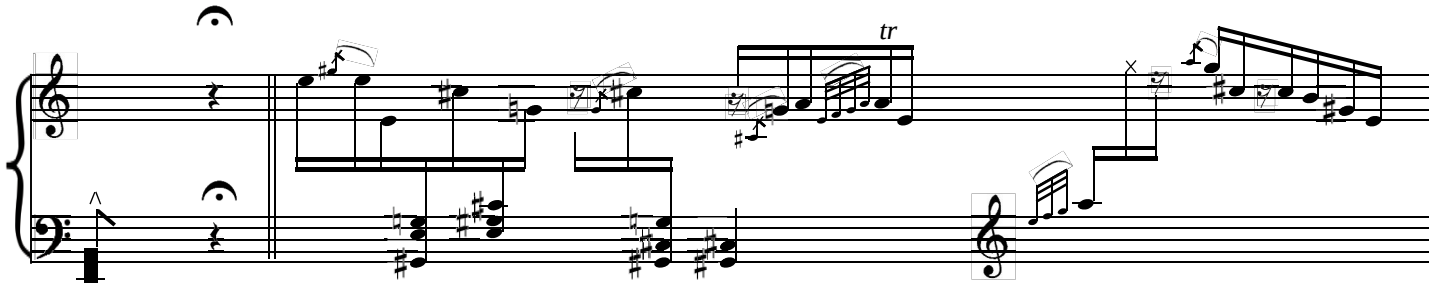
deep snows in the fields and woods, if you would keep your spirits



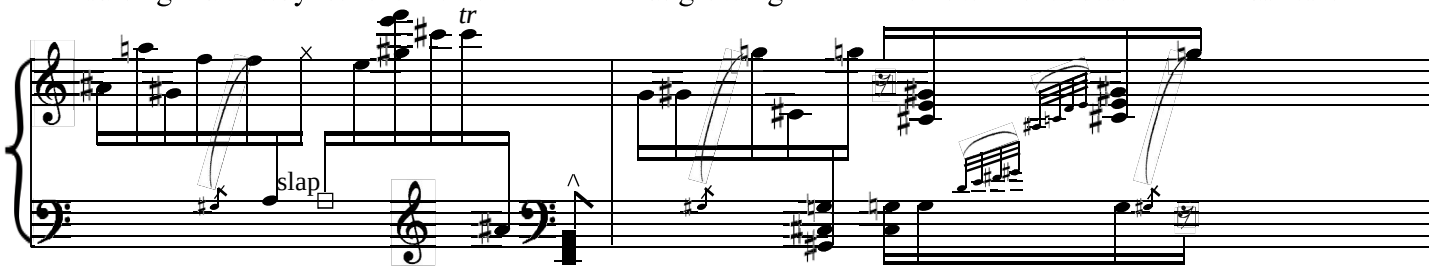
up. Deal with brute nature . Be cold and hungry and weary.



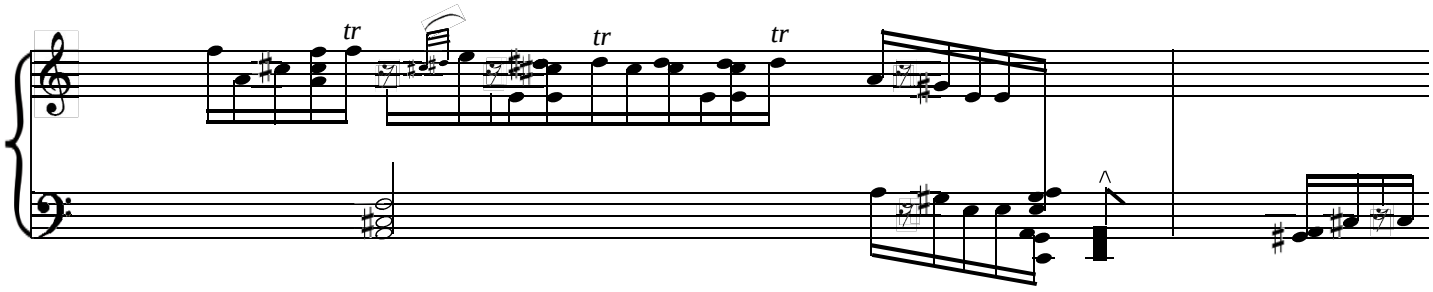
Evening. Though the sun set a quarter of an hour ago, his rays are still visible,



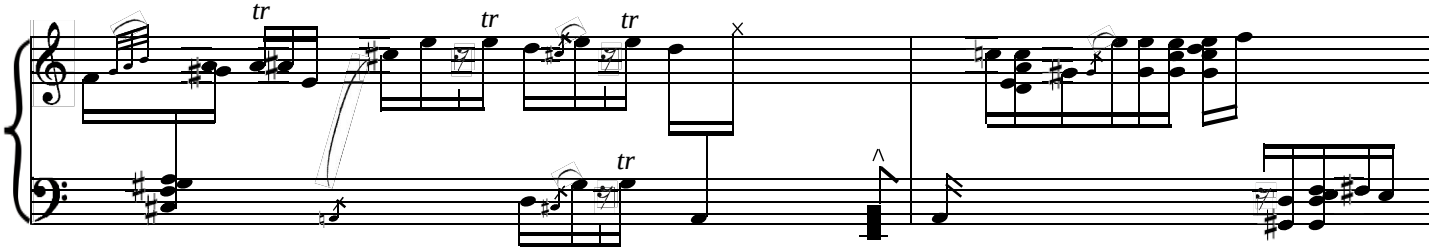
darting half- way to the zenith. That glowing morrow in the west flashes on



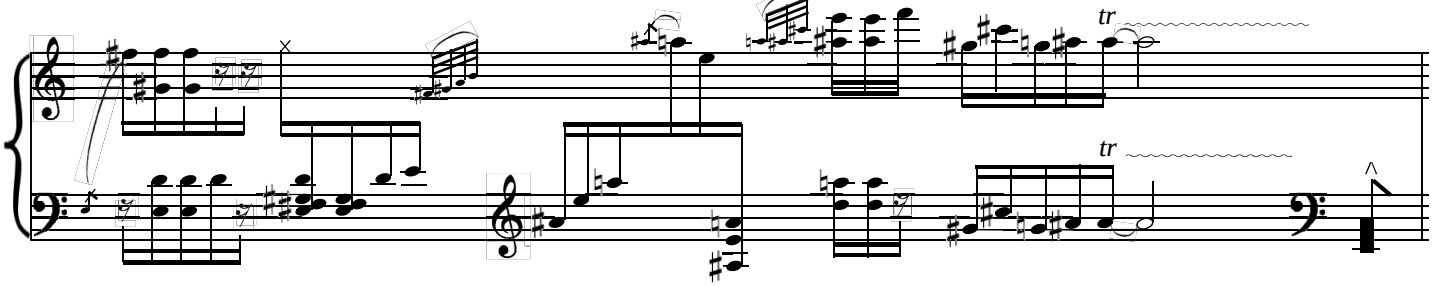
me like a faint presentiment of morning when I am falling asleep. A dull mist comes



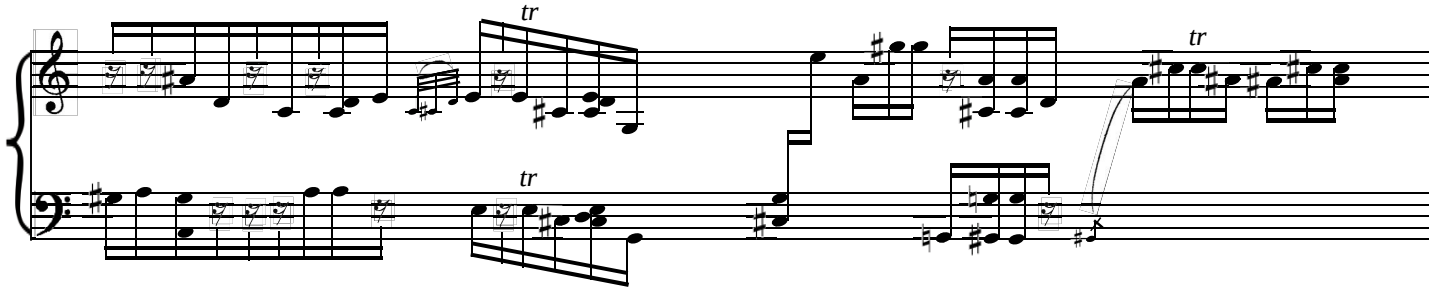
rolling from the west, as if it were the dust which day has raised. A column of smoke is rising from



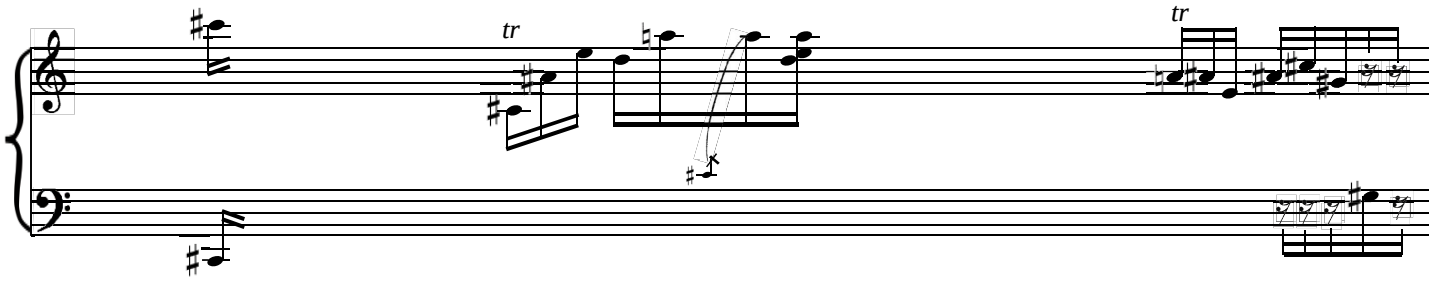
the woods yonder, to uphold heaven's roof till the light comes again.



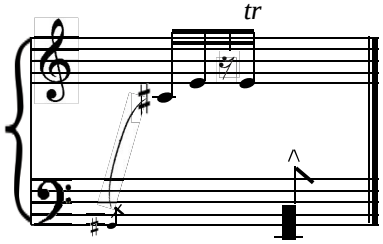
The landscape, by its patient resting there, teaches me that all good remains with him that waiteth,



and that I shall sooner overtake the dawn by remaining here, than by hurrying over the hills



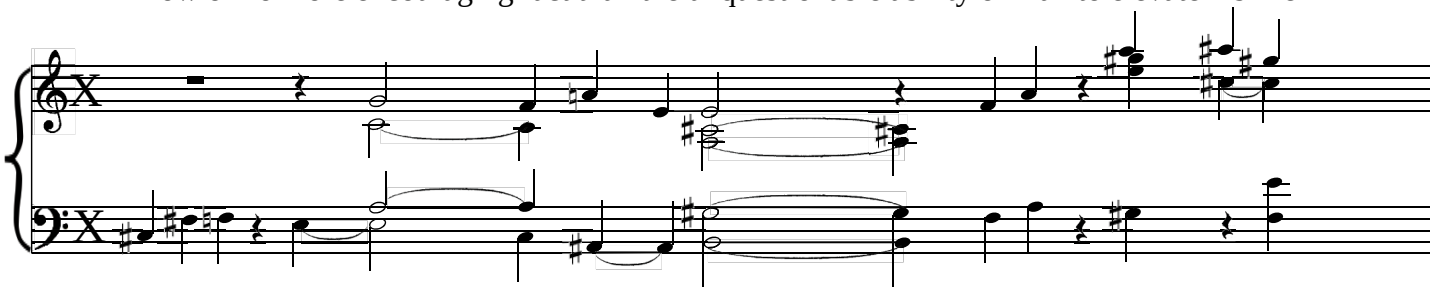
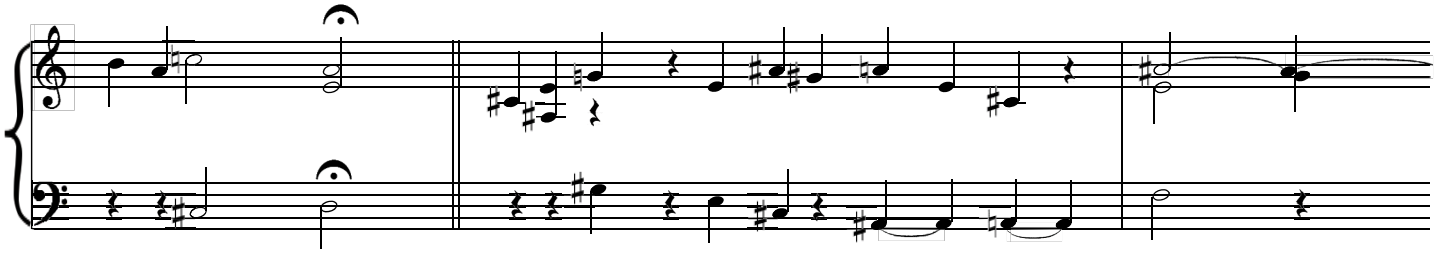
of the west.

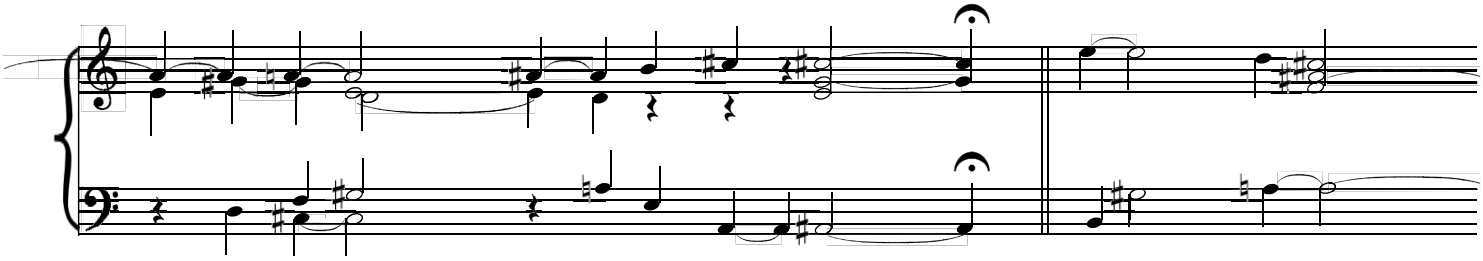


3'00"

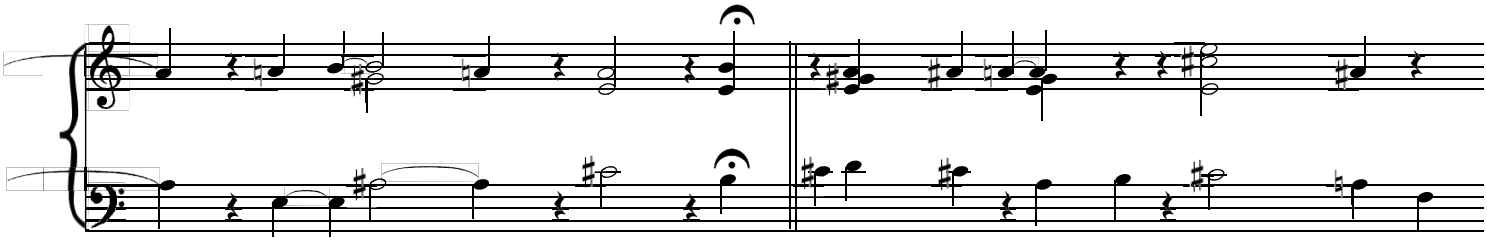
II. Thoreau on Man

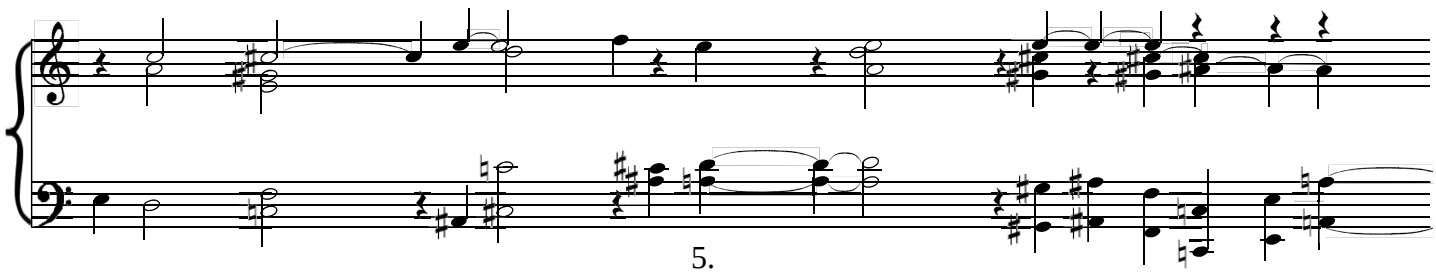
Senza misura

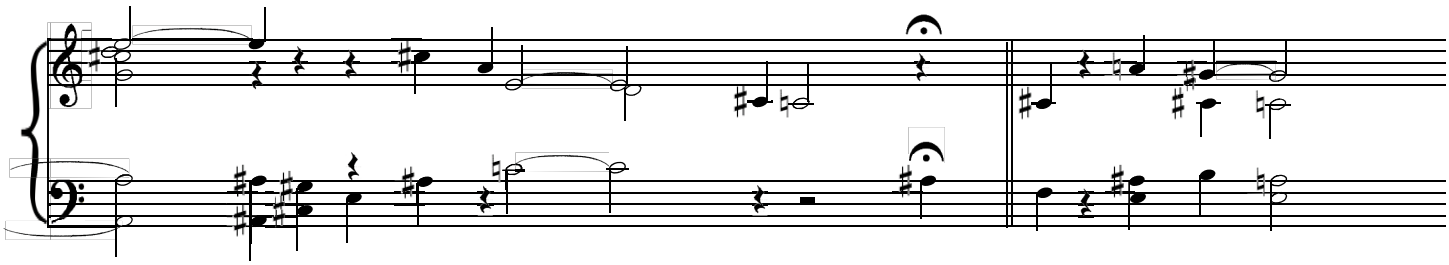
I know of no more encouraging fact than the unquestionable ability of man to elevate his life

by a conscious endeavor. In the long run men hit only what they aim at. Therefore, though

they should fail immediately, they had better aim at something high. Be resolutely and faithfully



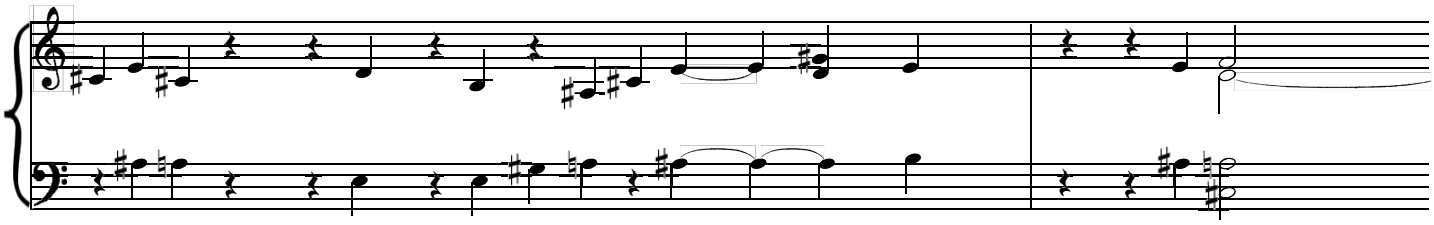
what you are, be humbly what you aspire to be. I learned this, at least, by my experiment; that if



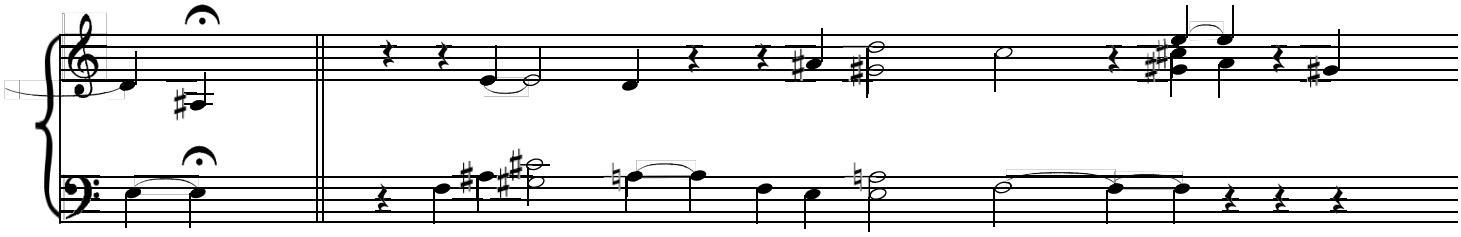
one advances confidently in the direction of his dreams, and endeavors to live the life which he has

imagined, he will meet with a success unexpected in common hours. If you have built castles



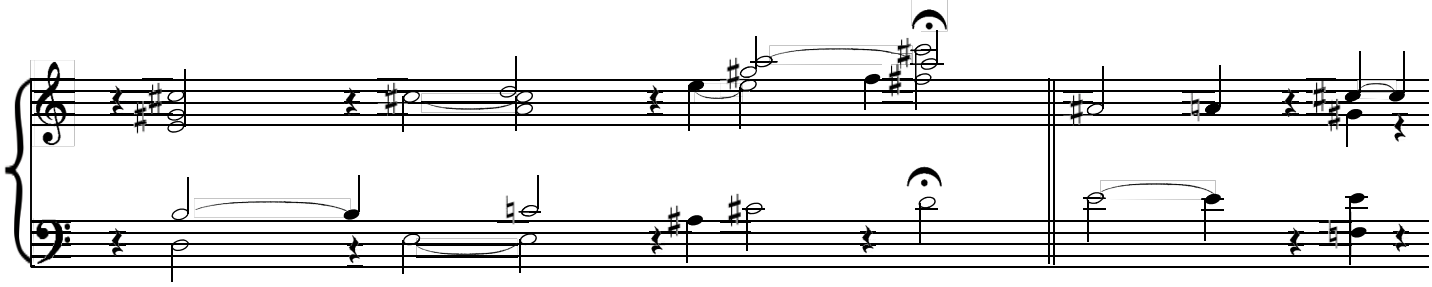
in the air, your work need not be lost; that is where they should be. Now put the foundations



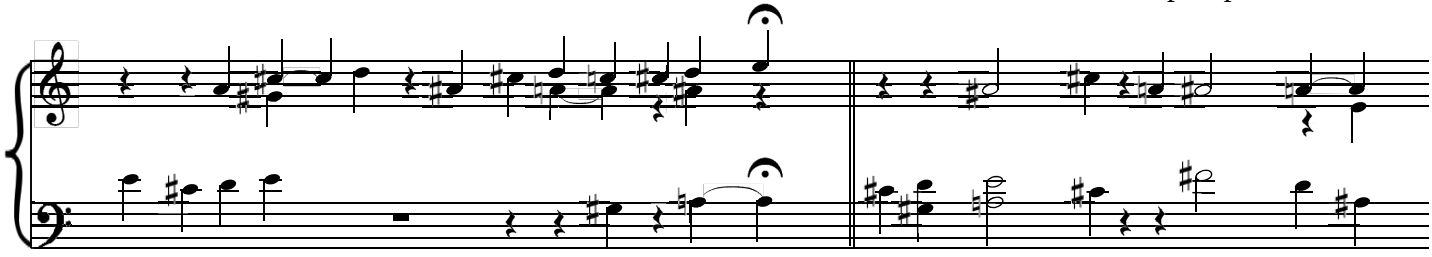
under them. Most of the luxuries and many of the so-called comforts of life are not only



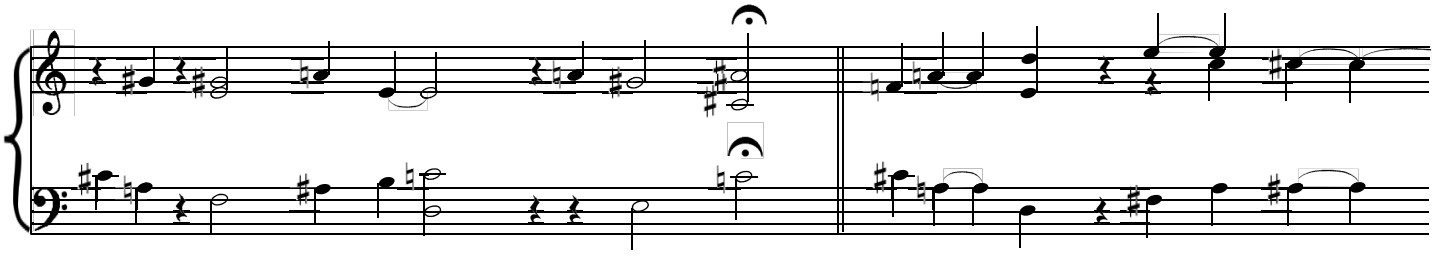
not indispensible, but positive hindrances to the elevation of mankind. However mean your life is,



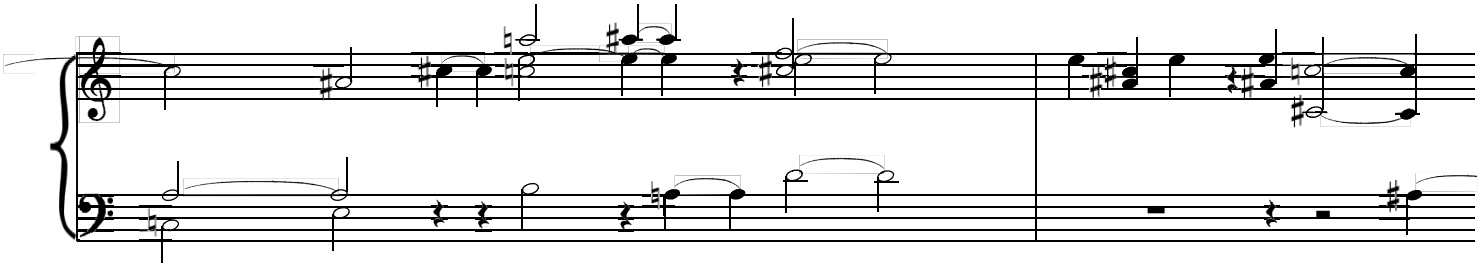
meet it and live it; do not shun it and call it hard names. I would rather sit on a pumpkin and have



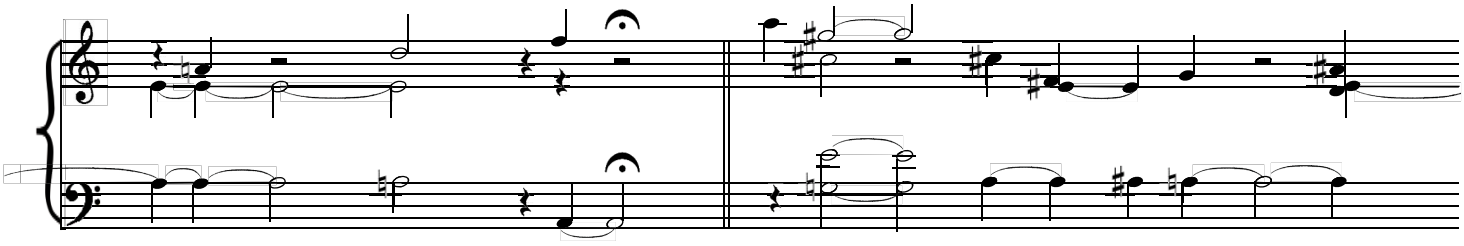
it all to myself, than be crowded on a velvet cushion. If a man does not keep pace with his



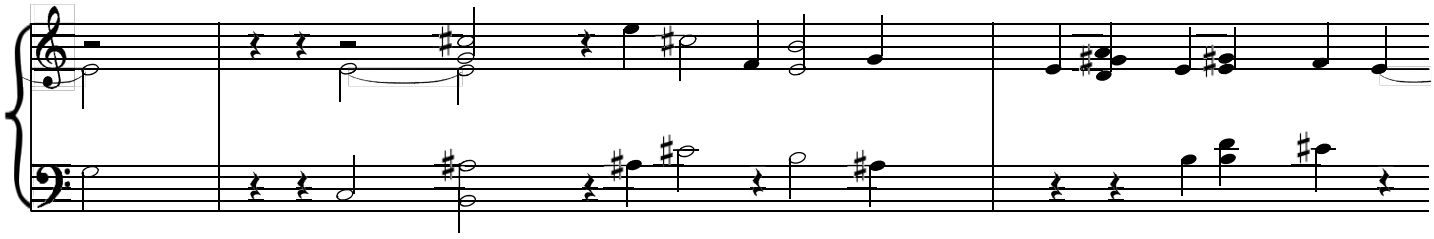
companions, perhaps it is because he hears a different drummer. Let him step to the music which



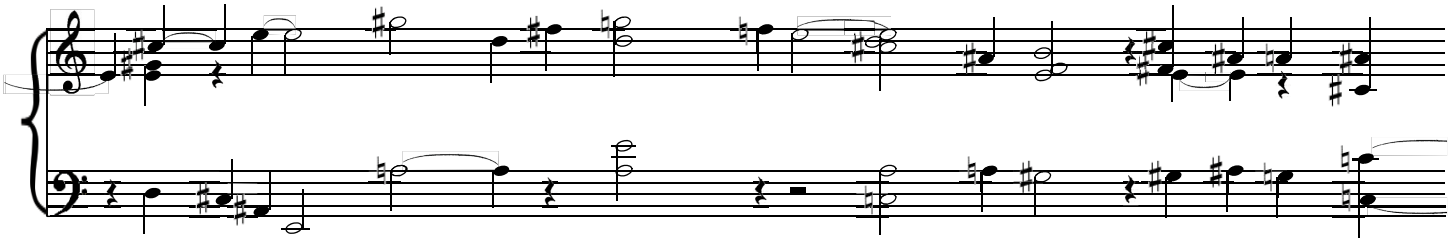
he hears, however measured or far away. A single gentle rain makes the grass many shades

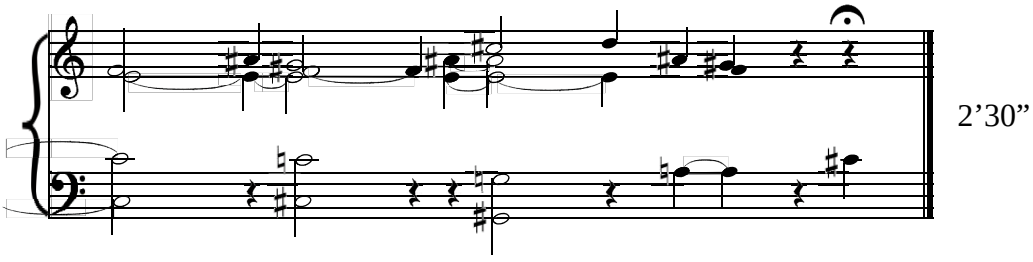


greener. So our prospects brighten on the influx of better thoughts. We should be blessed if we

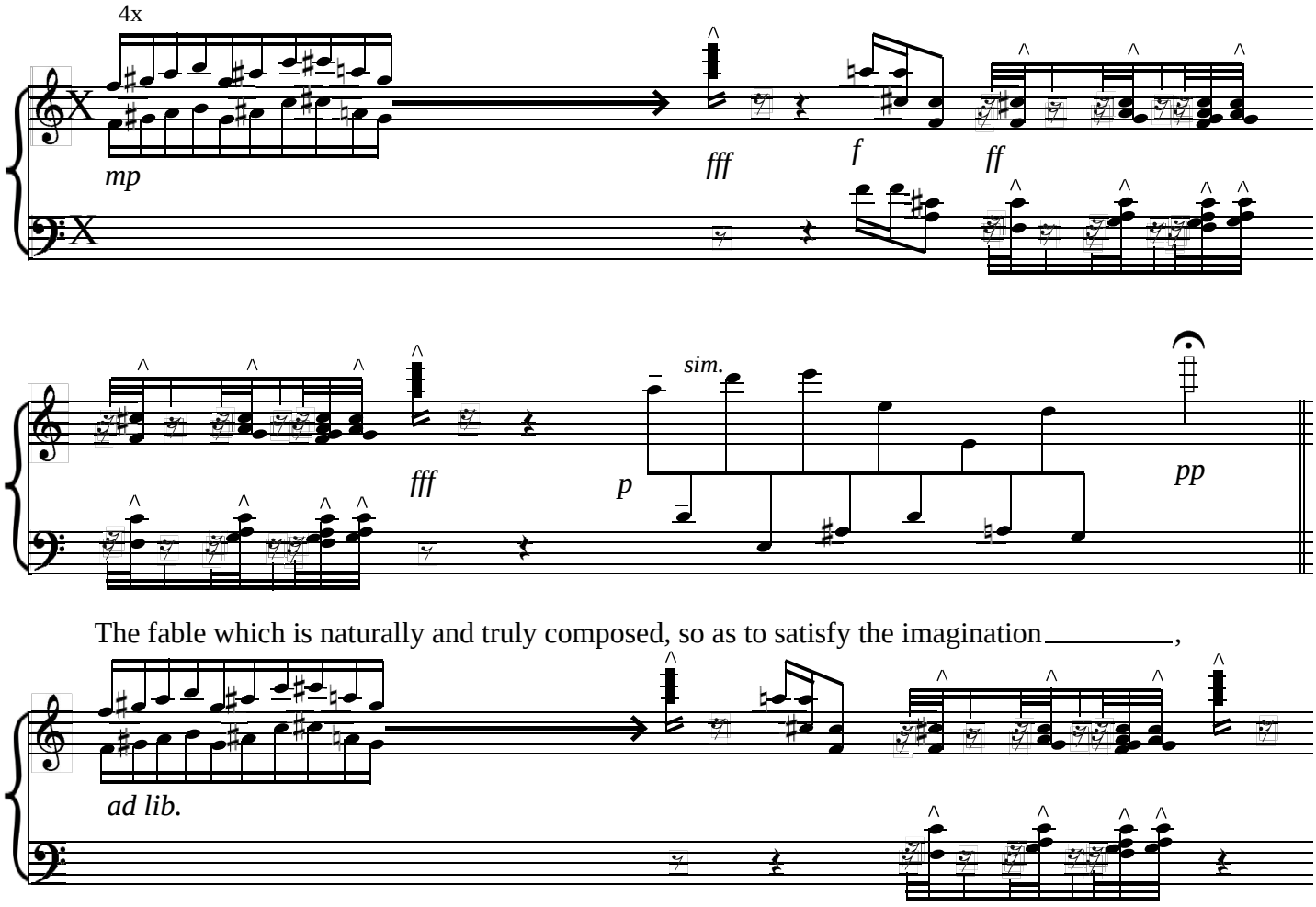


we lived in the present always, and took advantage of every accident that befell us, like the grass which



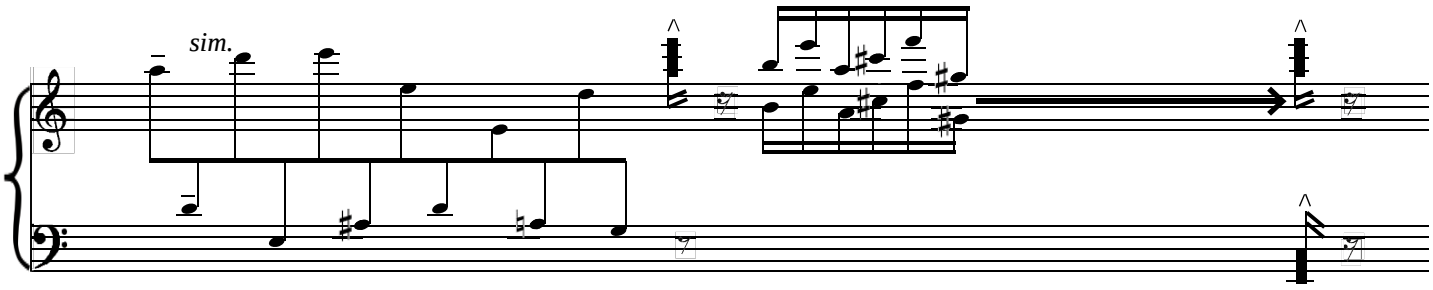
confesses the influence of the slightest dew that falls on it.

III. Thoreau on Myth

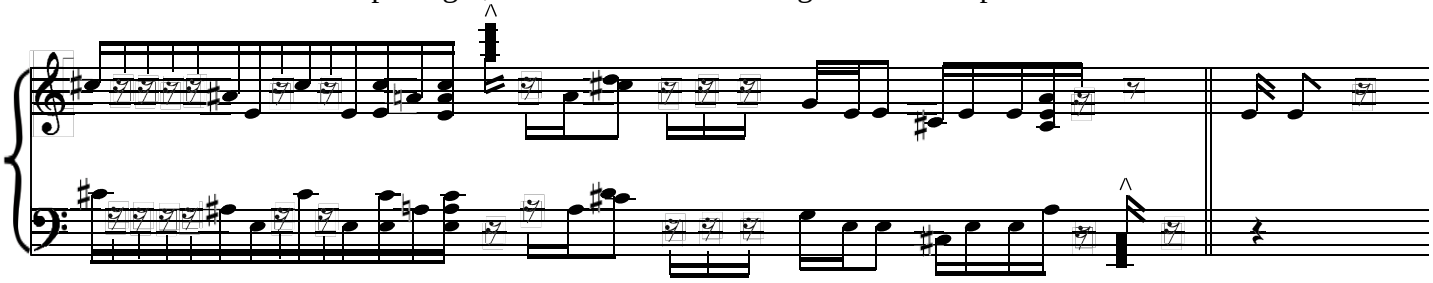
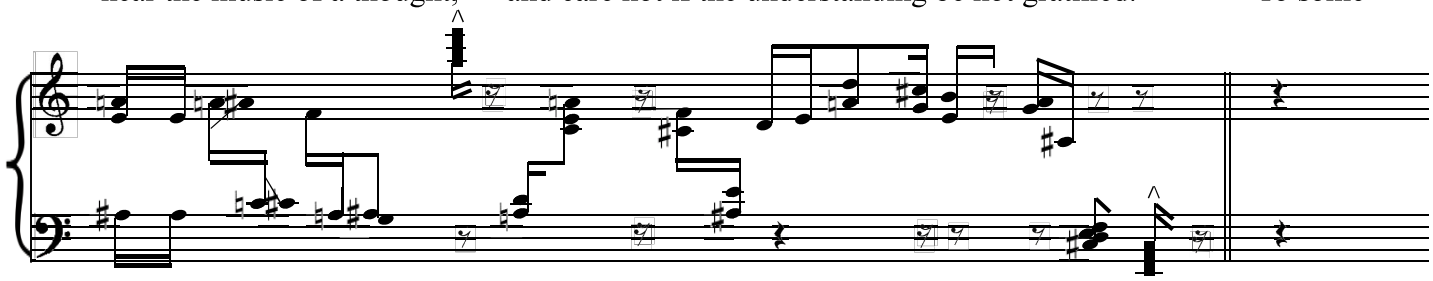
Senza misura

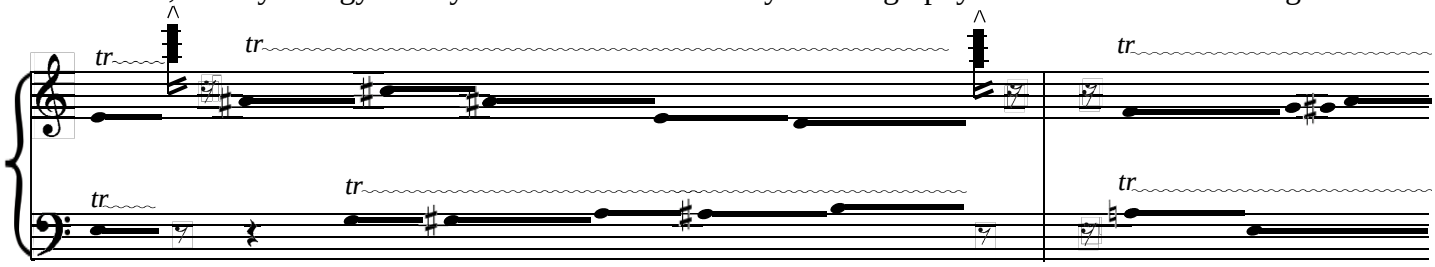


The fable which is naturally and truly composed, so as to satisfy the imagination_____,

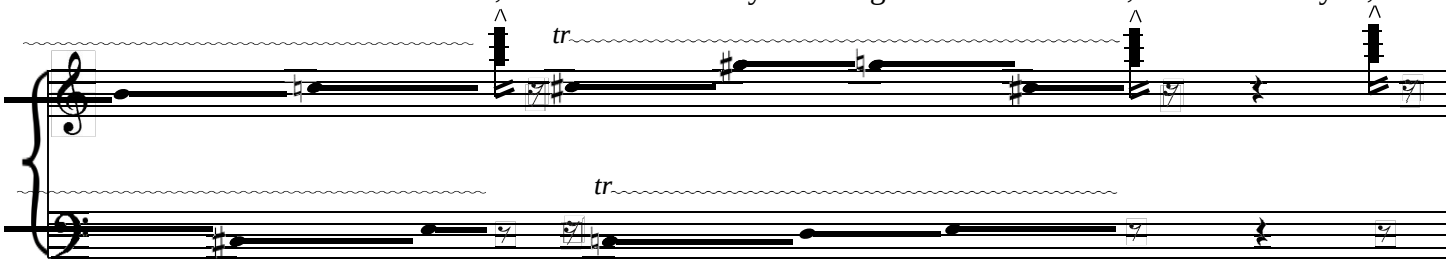
ere it addresses the understanding_____, beautiful though strange as a wild flower;



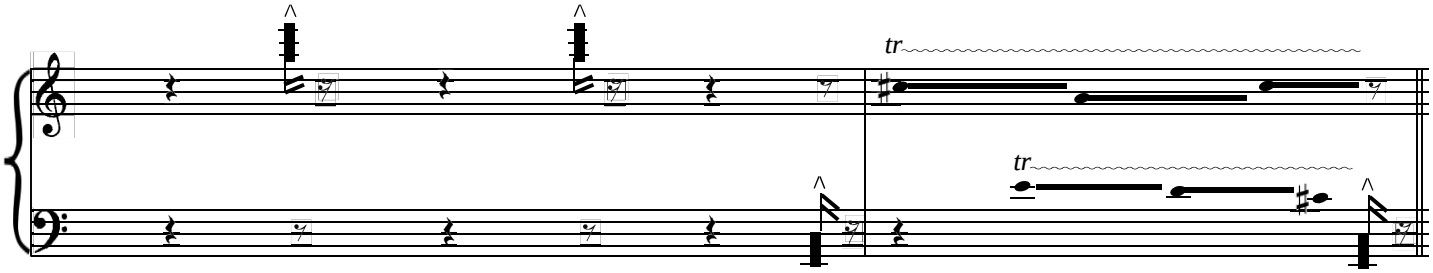
is to the wise man an apothegm, and admits of his most generous interpretation. We seem to

hear the music of a thought, and care not if the understanding be not gratified. To some

extent, mythology is only the most ancient history and biography. So far from being false or



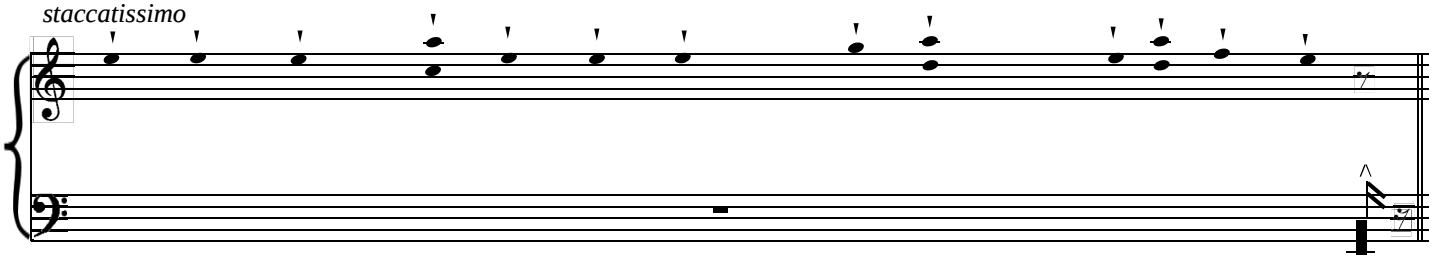
fabulous in the common sense, it contains only enduring and essential truth, the I and you,



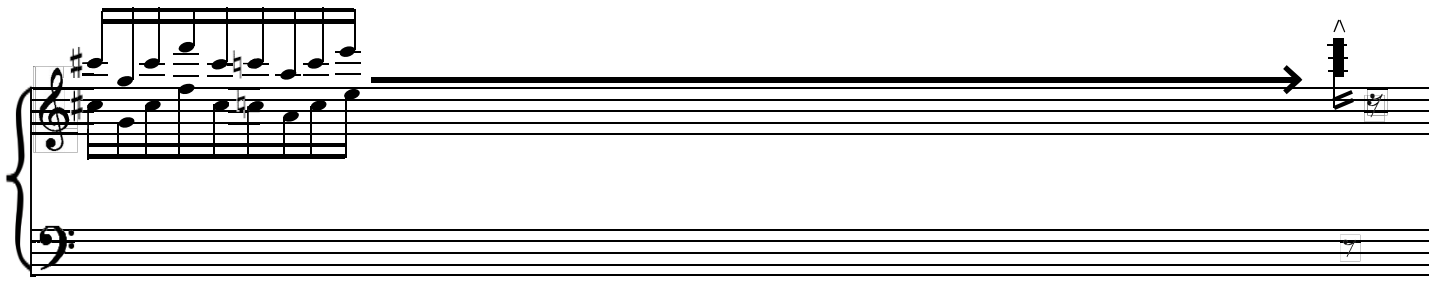
the here and there, the now and then, being omitted. Either time or rare wisdom writes it.



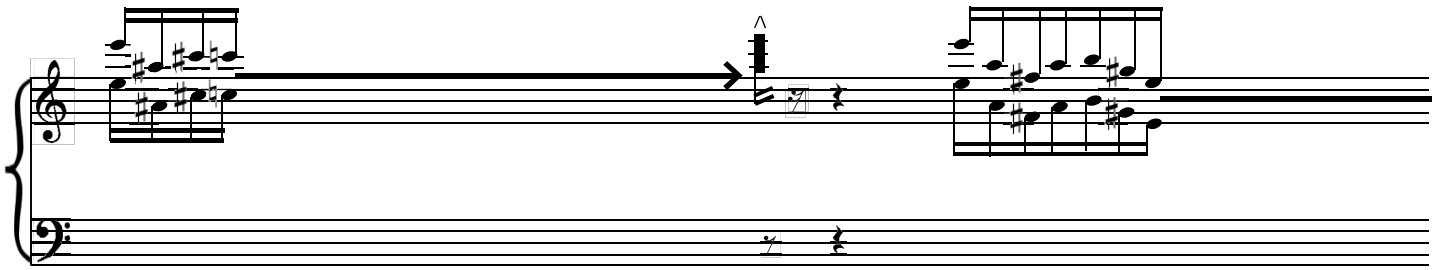
The poet is he who can write some pure mythology today without the aid of posterity.



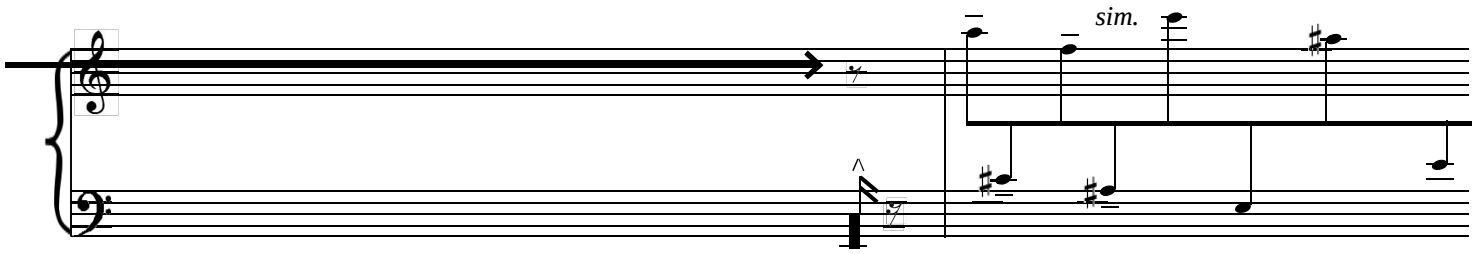
The hidden significance of these fables which is sometimes thought to have been detected,



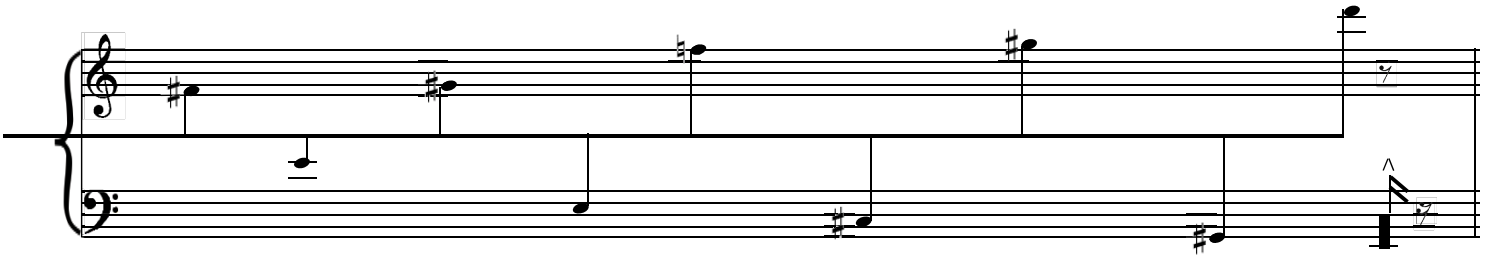
the ethics running parallel to the poetry and history, are not so remarkable as the readiness with



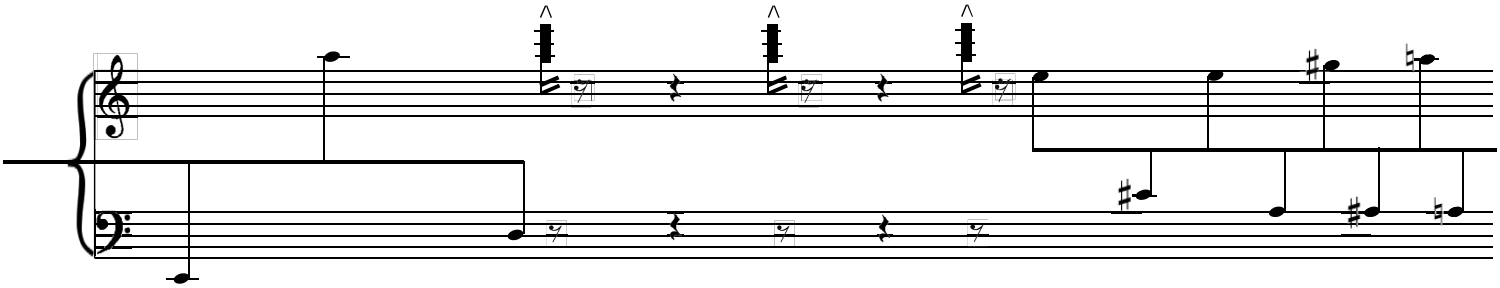
which they may be made to express a variety of truths. As if they were the skeletons of still



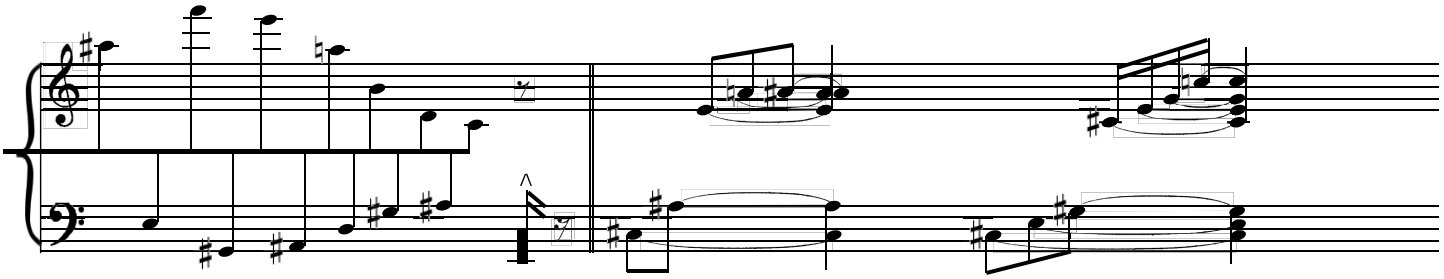
older and more universal truths than any whose flesh and blood they are for the time made to wear.

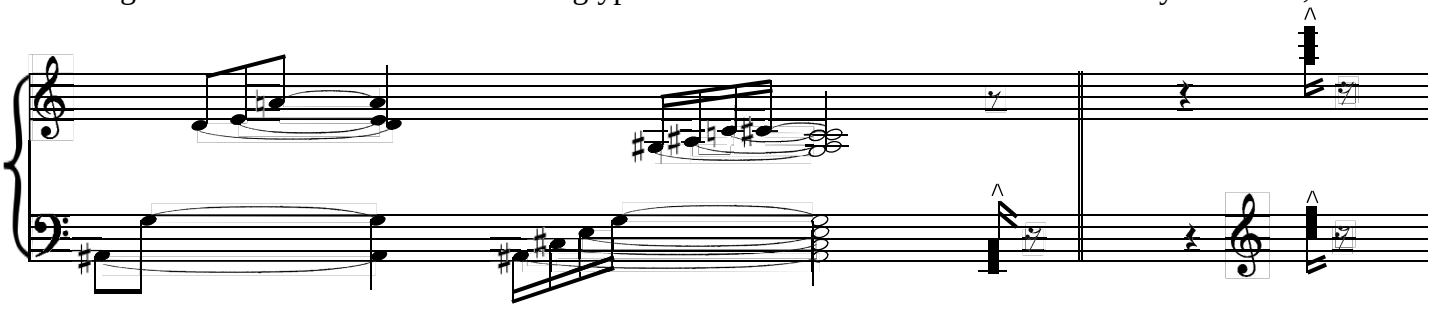


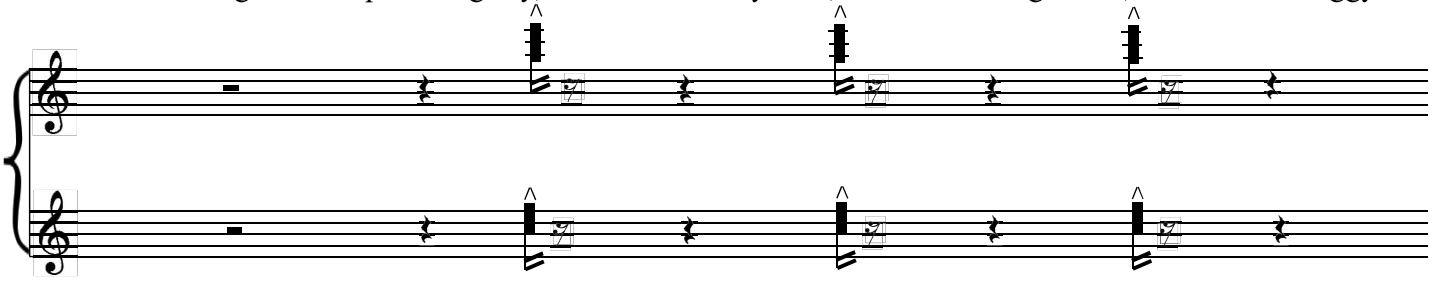
It is like striving to make the sun, or the wind, or the sea, symbols to signify exclusively



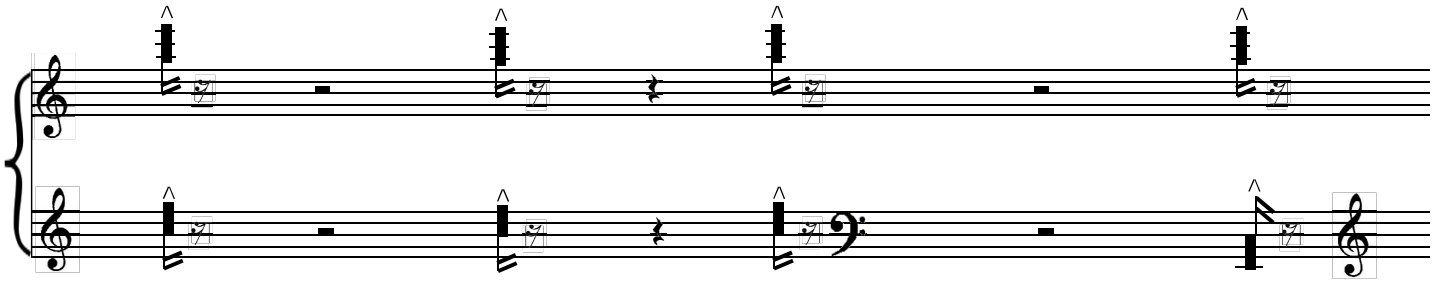
the particular thoughts of our day. In the mythus a superhuman intelligence uses the unconscious



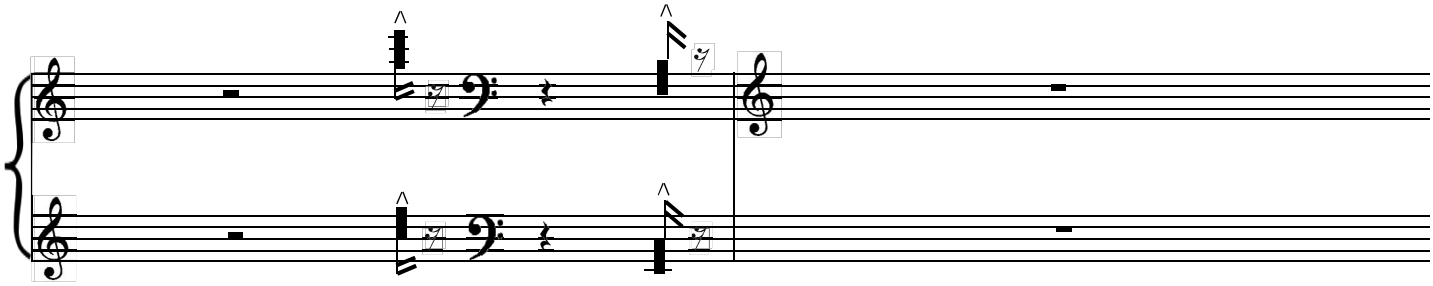
thoughts and dreams of men as its hieroglyphics to address men unborn. In my Pantheon,

Pan still reigns in his pristine glory, with his ruddy face, his flowing beard, and his shaggy



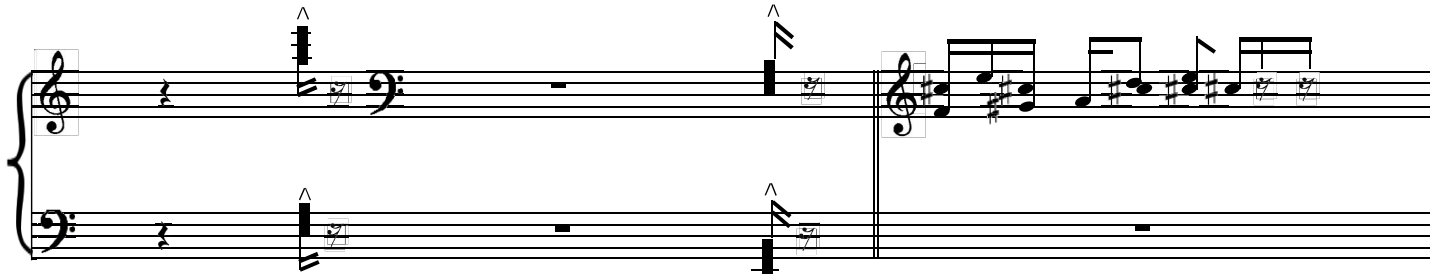
body, his pipe and his crook, his nymph Echo, and his chosen daughter Iambe; for the



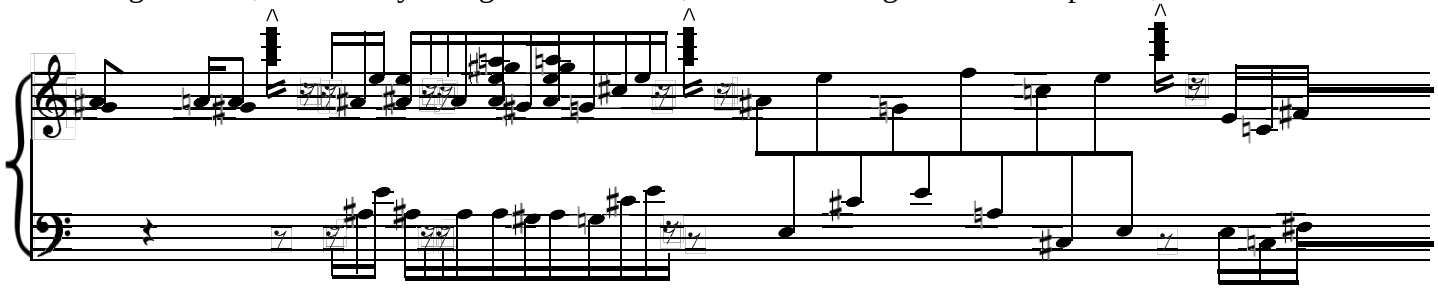
great God Pan is not dead, as was rumored. Perhaps of all the gods of New England and of



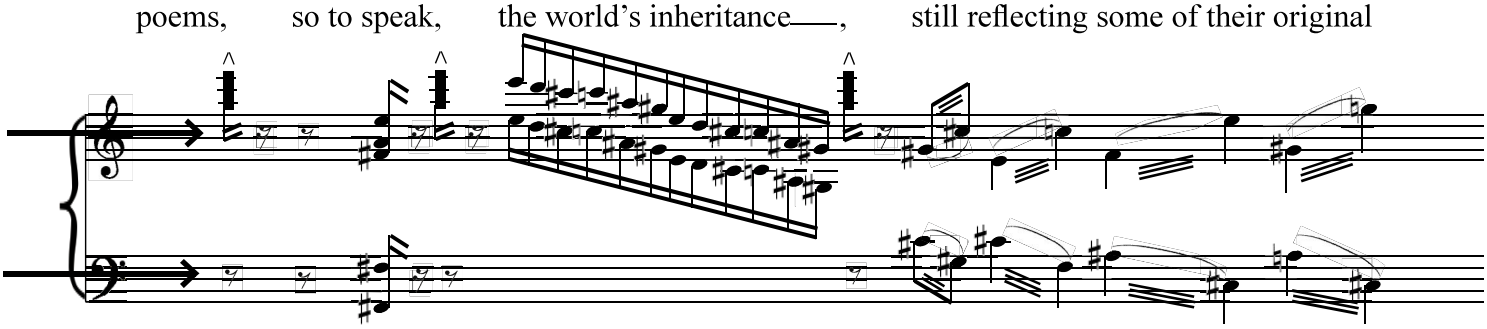
ancient Greece, I am most constant at his shrine. If we will admit time into our



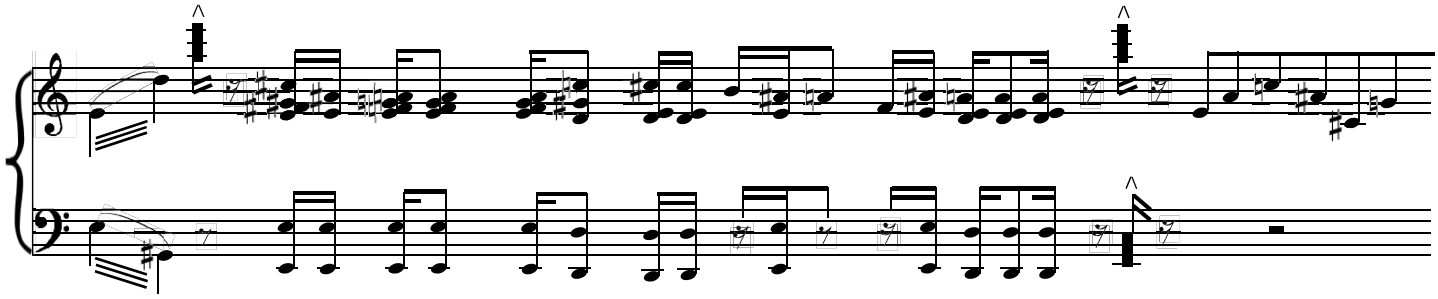
thoughts at all, the mythologies_____ , those vestiges of ancient poems, wrecks of



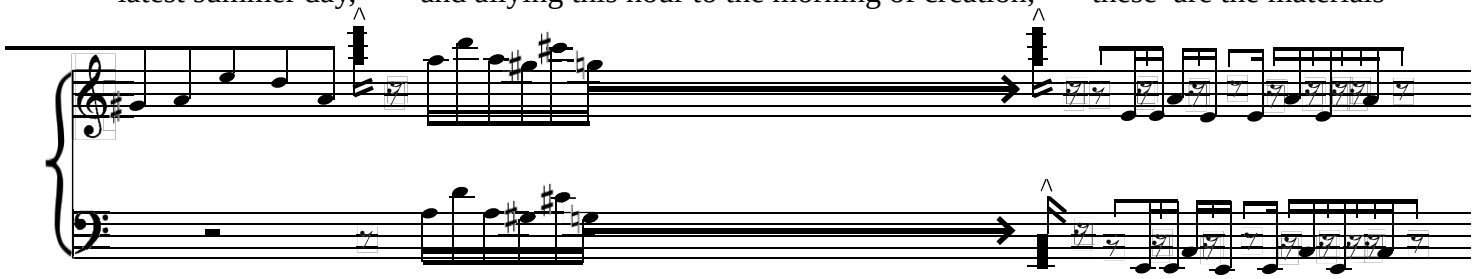
poems, so to speak, the world's inheritance___, still reflecting some of their original



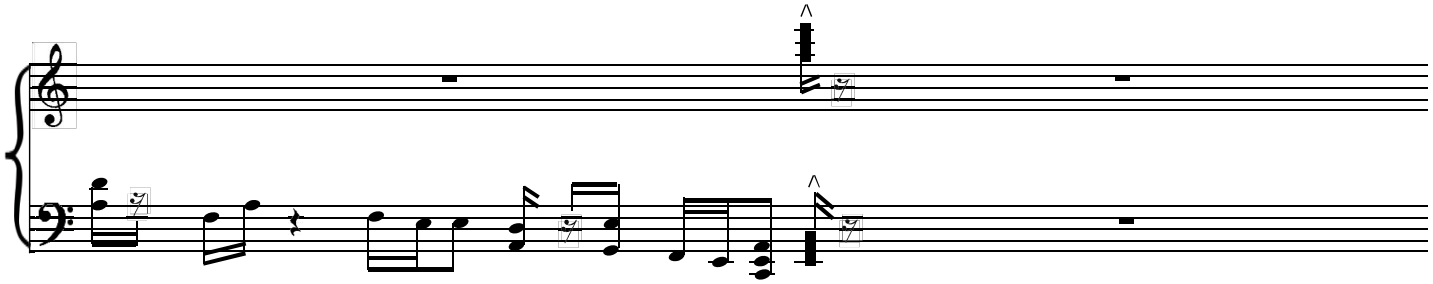
splendor, like the fragments of clouds tinted by the rays of the departed sun; reaching into the



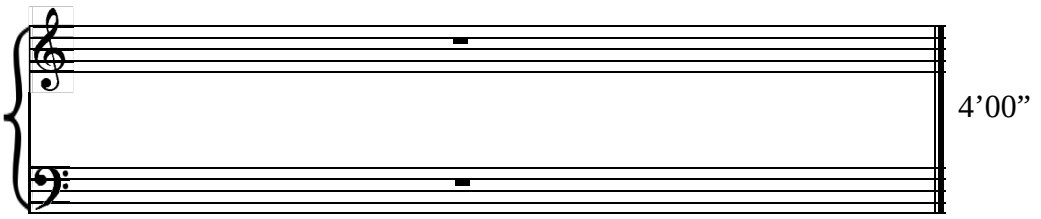
latest summer day, and allying this hour to the morning of creation; these are the materials



and hints for a history of the rise and progress of the race; how, from the condition of ants, it



arrived at the condition of men, and arts were gradually invented.



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